News release

Forecasting the weather better than ever

21 July 2003

Forecasting accuracy and quality of service at the Met Office are getting better and better, the Met Office's Annual Report and Accounts revealed today. In 2002/3, the Met Office exceeded its target for computerised forecasts and its service quality target, which includes input added by human forecasters.

The accuracy of the Met Office's published forecasts is heavily dependent on the performance of its computerised models, which are run twice daily for the whole of the Earth's atmosphere and oceans, and four times a day for the UK, Europe and the Atlantic. The Met Office uses a mathematical index to measure and monitor the performance of its computerised model on a rolling three-year basis. During last year, the index increased as a result of new scientific and mathematical breakthroughs and better use of satellite observations of the Earth's atmosphere and oceans.

Steve Noyes, Business Director at the Met Office said: "I am delighted that the leading-edge science of the Met Office and the UK's major investment in the meteorological satellite programmes are feeding through into real benefits for our customers in such a positive way."

The Met Office also uses an index to measure its quality of service. The target for this is derived from customer requirements for the accuracy and timeliness of services. 2002/3 saw an outstanding performance in services to the Highways Agency and local authorities to help keep roads clear of ice and snow, and also in forecasts to airports, essential for safety and planning aircraft movements. These and other successes led to a result that was well above target.

The Met Office's Annual Report and Accounts, published today, states that 2002/3 has been an exceptionally challenging and successful year for the Met Office in terms of its ability to predict major weather events. In July and August last year, the Met Office successfully predicted the change from a prolonged period of very hot, dry weather to severe thunderstorms, which caused floods in parts of Scotland, Northern Ireland and northern England.

The severe winds that affected England in late October, almost 15 years to the day since the 1987 Great Storm, resulted in several deaths and widespread power cuts. These were well forecast several days in advance and the Government congratulated the Met Office on this success. In January, excellent forecasts were provided to the public and emergency authorities, predicting a major snow event several days in advance. However, in both of these cases, despite the accuracy of the forecasts and advance notice, there was loss of life and major disruption to the public and businesses. This has raised concerns that the UK infrastructure is not yet able to gain maximum benefit from the recent improvement in weather forecasting.

Annual Report and Accounts from previous years

For further information:
Met Office Press Office +44 (0)1392 886655

Met Office Customer Centre 0870 900 0100
If you're outside the UK +44 (0)1392 885680

PRINTABLE VERSION

About
Met Office
Hadley Centre
Terms and conditions
Advertise on our site

News
News release archive
Media Centre

Learn
About the weather
From the bookshelf

Services

Mobile text forecasts
Weathercall
Marinecall
Mountain weather
MetWEB
Talk to a forecaster

Links
Met Office data users
National met. services
Scientific interest sites
EA Floodline
Directgov
Freedom of Information

Contact
Contact us
Questions answered

© Crown copyright